

## EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

### SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2005-2006 SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES HEARING

**Outcome:** 1

**Output Group:** 1.2 - Assistance for Individuals including those with special needs

#### **DEST Question No. E528\_06 - Amended**

Senator Evans provided the following Question on Notice in writing.

#### **Question:**

If so, can a copy of this baseline data be provided, i.e. what indicators are included?

#### **Answer:**

##### *Baseline Data for the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial*

In May 2003, the Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce released a national performance monitoring and evaluation framework for the Council of Australia Government (COAG) Indigenous trials. This framework provided guidance on data for the evaluation of the COAG trials.

Consistent with this, and current national reporting, baseline data collected for the Murdi Paaki region reflects the Productivity Commission's Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Indicators.

Further, in 2003 the Murdi Paaki COAG trial partners agreed to a Murdi Paaki Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to reflect the national requirements, and enable monitoring and evaluation reporting at a regional and local level. A copy of the Framework is attached.

The Department of Education, Science, and Training works closely with the New South Wales (NSW) state government, and the communities of the Murdi Paaki region to implement the Framework. While the NSW and Australian Governments share reporting responsibilities for the Murdi Paaki COAG trial, the majority of baseline data is derived from NSW sources. A copy of the NSW government's *Two Ways Together Report*, which contains Murdi Paaki baseline data, is attached.

The NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) is finalising an analysis of the baseline data contained in this report for the Murdi Paaki region.

## **Murdi Paaki COAG Trial Draft Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**

### **Background**

In November 2000, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed that all governments would work together to improve the social and economic well being of Indigenous people and communities. They agreed on a reconciliation framework based on three priority areas for government action:

- investing in community leadership and governance initiatives;
- reviewing programmes and services to ensure they deliver practical measures that support families, children and young people (including measures for tackling family violence, drug and alcohol dependency and symptoms of community dysfunction); and
- forging greater links between the business sector and Indigenous communities to help promote economic independence.

The COAG decision recognised that the commitment by Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments to Indigenous issues is spread across many agencies and programmes, with the result that activity is often fragmented. Monitoring and measuring the progress of individual programmes and the broader agenda has been difficult, and progress on the key indicators of social and economic well being has only been gradual.

Consistent with this, COAG later agreed, in April 2002, to trial working together with Indigenous communities in up to ten regions to provide more flexible programmes and services based on priorities agreed with the communities. The Trials involve whole-of-government approaches working with Indigenous communities to bring about better outcomes for Indigenous children, families and communities.

Governments agreed that both outcomes and management processes in Indigenous policy and service delivery need to be improved and the way to do that is twofold:

- governments must work together better at all levels and across all departments and agencies; and
- Indigenous communities and governments must work in partnership and share responsibility for achieving outcomes and for building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs.

One of the regions selected was the Murdi Paaki region in north western New South Wales. The Murdi Paaki region includes the major communities of Bourke, Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Cobar, Collarenebri, Coonamble, Dareton, Enngonia, Goodooga, Gulargambone, Ivanhoe, Lightning Ridge, Menindee, Walgett, Weilmoringle and Wilcannia. It is consistent with the Bourke ATSI region.

In the 2001 ABS Census, 7,542 Indigenous people resided in the Bourke region, representing 14 per cent of the total population.

This initiative is being progressed at the regional level with the ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council, and at a local level with the Community Working Parties (CWPs), established by the Council. These Working Parties are the primary Indigenous governance structures in the 16 Murdi Paaki communities. The CWPs comprises a broad cross section of each local Indigenous community.

The Murdi Paaki Regional Council, DEST and DET signed a Shared Responsibility Agreement on 22 August 2003. Key regional priorities under the agreement are:

- Improving the health and well being of children and young people;
- Improving educational attainment and school retention;
- Helping families to raise healthy children; and
- Strengthening community and regional governance structures.

Each CWP will also develop a Shared Responsibility Agreement in conjunction with DET and DEST, based on local priorities.

### **Purpose**

The monitoring and evaluation framework has been developed to assist in implementation and to assess the impact of the Murdi Paaki Trial. The framework aims to meet the reporting requirements of the COAG initiatives as well as the management requirements of the projects and community expectations. COAG's expectation is that the lessons learned from this initiative will be able to be applied more broadly.

Rigorous monitoring is essential in guiding Trial implementation. The framework aims to assist communities and governments by providing timely monitoring information in the following areas:

- progress in implementing the Trial (including the formation of community working parties and collaborative arrangements between communities and governments);
- community perspectives on the Trial and on community-government interactions; and
- outcomes in key priority areas (such as school attendance, and literacy and numeracy levels).

This information will play a key role in the ongoing process of Trial implementation and refinement as communities and governments adopt new ways of working together.

The Murdi Paaki Trial will also be evaluated to enable government and Indigenous communities to assess the impact of an approach which involves whole-of-government working with Indigenous communities to bring about better outcomes for Indigenous children, families and communities.

Specifically, we will evaluate the extent to which the Trial:

- improved the coordination of service delivery between and within governments;
- achieved community capacity to identify and pursue outcomes, community participation and community owned solutions;
- developed effective partnerships between all levels of government and the Indigenous community and shared responsibility between governments and Indigenous communities for outcomes;
- delivered better and lasting results at the local level in priority areas agreed with the community in shared responsibility agreements; and
- improved community functioning in the areas of child health, wellbeing, governance, family support, economic development and alcohol and substance misuse.

The evaluation will also:

- bring together the collective learning from the Trial sites; and
- identify success factors and new knowledge and translate them into sustainable models and policies for the future.

### **Outcomes Framework**

The COAG trials are guided by a framework of outcomes that is common to all states and territories. Strategies that involve all of government and community partnerships need to focus on broad holistic and long term outcomes. By having an outcomes framework, we are not suggesting a direct or exclusive effect on outcomes. Rather, it is expected that the Murdi Paaki strategies and activities will contribute to overall changes in community wellbeing in the context of other social and economic forces.

### **Audience**

The framework has a number of audience groups whose needs will not be consistent across the board. It must take account of those audiences, and have the capacity to provide them with information that meets their needs.

The audiences are:

**Murdi Paaki Indigenous communities:**

Close monitoring is critical to the development of strong community working parties. Indigenous people in Murdi Paaki are likely to know intuitively whether this initiative is a success. The evaluation should be capable of providing communities with information that will monitor progress and show clearly where impacts (both positive and negative) have occurred, to what extent and why. It should also map the ways in which relationships between communities and governments have been affected by the trial, and the impact of those changes. In the long term, the framework needs to provide communities with the capacity to monitor and evaluate their own activities.

**Government agencies (Local, State and Australian):**

Government agencies will need to monitor the progress of the Trial and assess the extent to which working together more effectively and in partnership with Indigenous people has improved outcomes. These assessments will flow into ongoing Trial implementation and future policy deliberations concerning Government programs and their delivery. Governments at all levels will also have individual requirements to be met from the trial (for example, how the trial outcomes impact on existing programs/initiatives, the implications for greater collaboration between governments in future, and possible alternative funding arrangements).

**Council of Australian Governments (COAG):**

COAG has an overarching interest in the evaluation, and will be most likely to focus on the higher level outcomes of the trial. These include consistent themes coming through from each of the trial sites, and how these translate into longer term policy issues. COAG will also have an interest in any lessons from the Trials that could be applied more broadly.

**Program Logic**

The question of what is monitored and evaluated is shaped by what the Trial aims to achieve in the short and long term. In the short term the Trial aims to improve community and government interactions in the Murdi Paaki region. In the long term these improvements should lead to social and economic changes for communities. The evaluation needs to address both the initial short term aims and the longer term outcomes, and the relationship between them.

The following program logic diagram illustrates this process, beginning with the collaboration of key stakeholders and resulting in improved outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities in the Murdi Paaki Region. It shows the intermediate stages that need to be achieved in order to bring about long term changes.

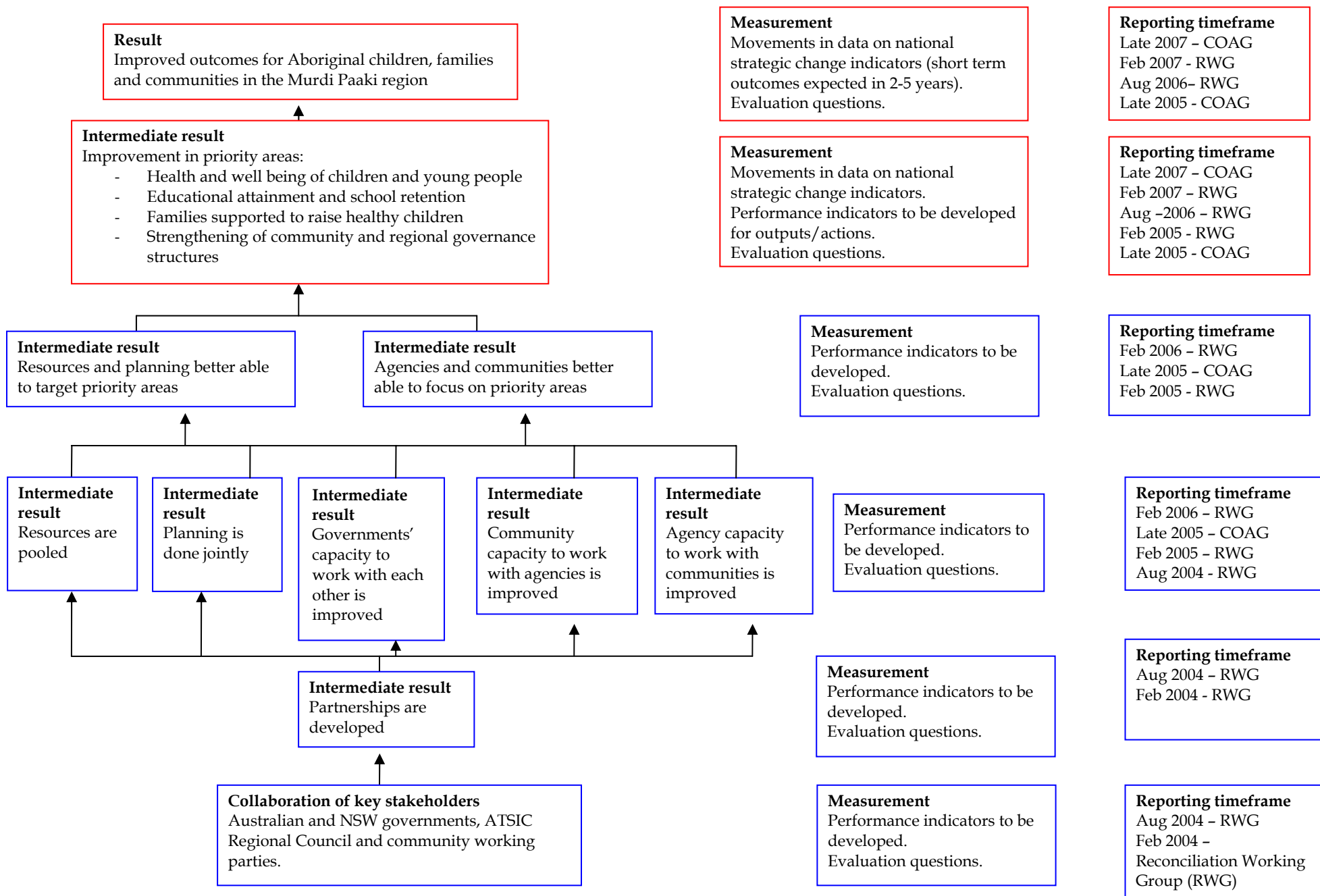
PROGRAM LOGIC

MEASUREMENT

REPORTING TIMEFRAME

Social and economic change in communities

Whole of government procedures



## Timeframe for Outcomes

As a guide, short term outcomes (2 to 5 years) are associated with a decrease in risk factors, while medium term outcomes (5 to 10 years) are associated with an enhancement in positive and healthy development. In the long term, it takes between 10-15 years for a vision for a healthy community to be embedded in the social contexts and institutions of a community.

The timeframes in which the government should expect to be able to measure outcomes in relation to the intermediate and long term stages identified in the program logic diagram are outlined below.

**Within 1-2 years**, the government should be able to measure outcomes of agency processes relating to partnership and collaboration. There should also be evidence of changes in outcomes in those areas where priority action has been taken (for example, decreases in school absenteeism, or changes in literacy and numeracy levels).

**Within 2 to 5 years**, there should be evidence of better identification, planning and targeting of resources. These should result in measurable improvements in areas such as child immunisation, oral health, age appropriate social development, and the identification of mental health care needs of children.

**Within 5 to 10 years**, the government should be able to measure improvements in children's mental health, and decreases in children's emotional and behavioural problems; decreases in school absenteeism and increases in retention rates; decreases in smoking, drug and alcohol dependence during pregnancy; decreases in the number of children at risk of harm; decreases in the number of children with intentional and unintentional injuries; decreases in domestic violence; stronger community cohesion; and reduced rates of juvenile and adult crime in disadvantaged areas.

**Within 10-15 years**, the government should be able to measure changes in educational outcomes, in particular, for children from socio economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

## Evaluation Questions

A draft list of evaluation questions has been included in Appendix A. These will need to be informed by discussion with community representatives and other stakeholders. They provide an indication of the likely data requirements for the evaluation. They need to be mapped against existing and proposed data sources in developing the methodology.

## Methodology

In developing the methodology there are a number of issues that need to be considered. In particular, the evaluation needs to provide information that can be used both for program implementation and refinement (formative information), and for making judgements about the overall effectiveness of the Trial (summative information). The evaluation also needs to provide information at a range of levels, including the Murdi Paaki regional level and the level of individual community sites.

## Implementation

A key aspect of the trial process is for governments to be more responsive. It is critical that both the Evaluation and Steering Committees receive regular community level information on how the project is operating and whether the relationships between communities, government and service providers are improving in ways that benefit the participating communities. The Murdi Paaki Action Team is in a good position to collect this information through its regular face to face contact with communities.

A possible approach is outlined below, involving two types of information:

1. Each community could be assisted to provide regular feedback through the use of a simple template. This template might ask questions like:
  - What is working well and why?
  - What is not working well and why not? and
  - what can we, as partners in this process, do to improve the situation?
2. The second type of information would be a summary and analysis of the information collected from communities. It would incorporate the Action Teams' analysis of community responses, including any trends and their implications, possible blockages, and how they might best be resolved.

## Effectiveness

Evaluating the effectiveness of the Trial will involve short, medium and long term requirements. It will include ongoing monitoring of outcomes in priority areas as well as an assessment of the role of the Trial in any changes. It will look at issues such as whether collaboration is working or not, cost effectiveness, any adjustments which need to be made to the model, and reasonable reporting timeframes (for example, half yearly or annually). It will also examine the responsiveness of supporting government agencies and how the interaction between individual agencies and communities is actually working in the long term.

Aspects of the methodology will need be determined in consultation with communities and individuals. It is expected that some of this work will be undertaken by independent evaluators with appropriate skills working to the Evaluation Committee, who would regularly update the Steering Committee.

## Data Collection and Monitoring

There will be two levels of data collected.

1. Individual community sites.



Performance and outcomes for each site will be monitored against agreed benchmarks. This will allow the local sites to evaluate their outcomes (as agreed in the Local Shared Agreements). Data collected at this level can be qualitative and quantitative. Some data will contribute to the region wide evaluation while other data will remain within the local community for internal evaluation.

## 2. The Murdi Paaki regional level.

At the regional level DEST and DET are jointly responsible for reporting on progress against agreed benchmarks and outcomes. Other agencies have a responsibility for providing data. Data at this level will inform the COAG Framework for Reporting on Indigenous Disadvantage, allowing conclusions to be drawn about the overall impact of the Trials in key outcome areas.

Information on levels of partnership and collaboration will also be collected and analysed from the individual sites. Learnings from the whole Murdi Paaki region will inform the COAG Trials national framework (particularly in relation to the benefits of taking a partnership approach).

### **Reporting**

Regular reporting arrangements will need to be put in place in addition to the long term reporting requirements of COAG. One approach would be to provide a regular report to the Steering Committee covering qualitative feedback from communities on the implementation of the Trial and statistical information on progress in priority areas. Arrangements for reporting back to communities will also need to be addressed.

### **Management**

There are a number of management issues that need to be resolved in developing the methodology. These include data sharing, resources, funding sources, community involvement, and structured reporting arrangements.

## **Appendix A**

### **Draft Murdi Paaki Evaluation Questions**

#### Overall analysis

What overall lessons did we learn from the trials? Were there any unintended consequences? What success of the trials can be replicated in other sites? What further research information is required?

Has the Trial been cost effective? How do the costs compare with the overall benefits for Aboriginal people in the Murdi Paaki region?

#### What was achieved through collaboration and partnership?

Is there evidence of greater cooperation and collaboration between government agencies? What practical inter-agency arrangements have been put in place?

Has the Trial led to cultural changes in service delivery agencies?

Is there evidence that the Trial improved internal community capacity for leadership and skill development?

Has the Trial helped develop a capacity for governance/self determination in Indigenous communities?

How many Community Working Parties (CWPs) have been formed as part of the Trial? Have they been provided with support? Are they representative of their communities?

What are the perspectives of stakeholders on the partnership process and its effectiveness?

Did the trials achieve shared responsibility? Have communities been able to negotiate as genuine partners with government agencies?

What partnership arrangements are in place (for example, between CWPs and government agencies) to enable a shared responsibility approach to occur/continue?

#### Is this 'new way' of working producing more coordinated service planning and better service delivery?

How successful are the community planning processes? Has there been community involvement in the development of indicators and outcome measures? Have communities been involved in monitoring and evaluation?

How effectively have the different levels of government (Commonwealth, State and local) worked together? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a single lead agency?

How does the Trial interact with other programs or initiatives for Indigenous people?

Is there better coordination of government programs and services? Has this led to improved service delivery?

How effectively are community needs being identified? Are services being tailored to community needs and aspirations?

*Improvements in the priority areas - is the trial bringing about better outcomes for families and communities?*

Have there been long term changes in social and economic conditions for Indigenous communities in the Murdi Paaki region? To what extent are these changes attributable to the Trial?

Are community aspirations being met? Have there been changes in the agreed priority areas?

What specific initiatives have been undertaken as part of the Trial and what have been their outcomes (for example, the Joint Education Project and the Murdi Paaki Community and Education Initiative)?

Are the community governance initiatives self sustaining?

What data requirements need to be met for the national evaluation? What requirements have been agreed to by COAG? How should the evaluation report back to communities?

## **Appendix B Principles**

The design and conduct of the evaluation seeks to adhere to the following principles:

**Research or evaluation activities respect the rights of Aboriginal people to have appropriate control and involvement in the design, execution and use of findings.**

**Evaluation is relevant and of practical use**

That is, the findings can be used to either inform policy or improve service planning or delivery to benefit the community. Data should not be collected unless it is of practical use (to minimize the burden of collecting lots of data).

**Aboriginal people are involved in and learn the practice of good program evaluation.**

Active involvement in evaluation and the use of findings to improve services or planning is an integral part of taking responsibility for the outcomes in the community. Emphasis should be given to a participatory style of evaluation (such as action research). Aboriginal people should be provided with training in good evaluation practices where this is required.

**The Murdi Paaki Evaluation framework is consistent with the national Framework for evaluation, and informs it.**

In part, this means working within the headline and strategic indicators of the Indigenous Disadvantage Reporting Framework (ISCRCSSP for COAG). It also means contributing to the national monitoring and reporting requirements.

**Outcomes are conceptualised at a population and not an individual level.**

We seek improvement of whole population groups within the region, not just for individuals.

**At each site, priorities are identified by the community and outcomes agreed through local agreements, incorporating shared responsibility commitments. The outcomes should fit into the broad outcomes framework.**

**Regular feedback is provided between community and governments**

**Evaluation issues such as cost effectiveness and cost benefit as a result of better coordination and responsiveness are identified and tested in terms of improving outcomes for Indigenous people**

**The Evaluation should have both formative and summative components.**

That is it should provide information that can be used both for program implementation and refinement, and for making judgements about the overall effectiveness of the Trial.

